

# **I'm Going To Appear Before a Legislative Committee ...**

## **... A Citizen's Guide to Attending Legislative Committee Meetings**

### **What is the Role of a Legislative Committee?**

When a bill is introduced in either the Senate or the House, it is sent to a standing committee for study and to receive public comment. The committee makes an initial determination if the proposal should go forward in the legislature. The committee can suggest amendments to the bill, approve it for further action by the full Senate or House, or kill it.

### **What Happens to a Bill When it is Referred to a Committee?**

Once a bill has been sent to a committee, the committee chairman will set a date and time for a hearing on the proposal. You can keep track of the committee's schedule by reading the notices on the committee room door, by following the daily calendar available in the Senate or House lobby or the capitol rotunda, or by checking the Legislature's website (<http://legisweb.state.wy.us>).

### **Who are the Players at the Committee Hearing?**

A Senate committee has five members; a House committee has nine. The chairman presides and controls the meeting. Committee staff takes notes and assist the chairman. Seats are available for the public. Committee meetings are always open to the public.

### **What is the Order of Business in the Committee Hearing?**

When the time comes to consider a particular bill, the chairman will announce its name and number. The sponsor or sponsors will explain the proposal to the committee. Any member of the committee may ask the sponsor questions. Next, other legislators may speak and can be questioned.

Then the chairman will ask if anyone in the audience wants to comment on the proposal -- either for or against. That person also can be questioned. When everyone has spoken, the committee will "work the bill." This is when the committee discusses the proposal, considers amendments and decides if the bill should go forward or be stopped.

### **Will I be Welcome at Any Committee Meeting?**

You will always be welcome at any committee meeting. The members of the Legislature want you to be an active participant in the legislative process. If you are interested in a particular bill, you should be in the committee room when the hearing is scheduled.

### **What do I Need to do if I Want to Attend a Committee Meeting?**

When you arrive at the meeting room, you will need to sign the **Attendance Sheet** indicating you attended the meeting. You can observe the proceedings, present additional written information to the committee, or tell the members how you feel about the proposal. This is where the citizen can have direct input to the Legislature on any proposed legislation.

If you would like to provide written information to the Committee, please fill out the **Committee Handout Form** when you arrive at the meeting room and give the form and a copy of your handout (including an electronic copy, if available) to the committee staff. Filling out the form ensures that your information is available to all members of the Legislature.

### **How Do I Make an Effective Presentation to the Committee?**

- Stand if you want the committee chairman to call on you to speak.
- When the chairman recognizes you, give your name clearly and distinctly and the name of the group or organization for whom you will speak, if any.
- Don't repeat what another speaker has said. If your statement would be the same, simply state that you agree with a previous speaker.
- Be brief.
- Consider having a handout with a summary of your points. Have enough copies for the committee, committee staff and a few for interested members of the audience. Before you begin, hand all copies to the chairman or committee staff for distribution.

### **Do I Have to Register as a Lobbyist Before I Speak?**

If you are speaking on your own behalf, you do not have to register. If you are representing a group or organization, you do. The Secretary of State handles lobbyist registrations.

### **What Does it Mean to "Address the Chair?"**

This procedure is to ensure an orderly flow of discussion at a legislative meeting. Since the chairman controls the meeting, all comments, questions, and responses must go through the chairman. Anyone who wishes to speak -- committee members, witnesses or members of the public -- must be recognized and called on by the chairman.

Once recognized, that person starts by saying, "Mr. Chairman," and continuing with the question or statement. The person talks to the chairman even if the question or the comment is directed to someone else. For example, a committee member might say, "Mr. Chairman, would the sponsor of the bill tell us if an additional appropriation will be required?" The sponsor then would reply, "Mr. Chairman, the proposal would not require additional funding."

### **Is the Procedure Similar at Interim Committee Meetings?**

Between sessions, the Legislature holds meetings of the joint interim committees where the same standing committees of both the Senate and House meet together. They are held between the regular legislative sessions held in the Capitol Building. The joint interim meetings often are held at various communities in the state.

These committees undertake complex or major issues during the interim. The procedure is very similar to appearing before a standing committee during the legislative sessions. If you want to be sure to have a spot on the program, you can contact the committee chairman and tell him or her of your intention to appear. If you can't be there in person, you can always submit a written statement, which will be distributed to the committee and made a part of the meeting record. ■